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Review of social development trends and challenges in the context of the development agenda beyond 2015

Confronting rising inequalities in Asia and the Pacific: trends and opportunities in the context of the development agenda beyond 2015

Note by the secretariat

Summary

As the development agenda beyond 2015 takes shape, it is increasingly being recognized that inequality is an impediment to the integration of economic growth, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. Despite high and enduring economic growth and significant progress in terms of poverty eradication, inequalities persist in Asia and the Pacific, and in some instances they have intensified, between women and men, girls and boys, urban and rural areas, and different age and ethnic groups. Over time, the rich and poor may both be better off; yet, the gap between them is increasing in many countries in the region. Multiple forms of inequality reinforce each other, creating "an inequality trap" that disproportionately affects women and the most vulnerable members of society, including the poor, youth, persons with disabilities, migrants and older persons.

An analysis of the different forms and pathways of inequalities in Asia and the Pacific is contained in the present document. It is suggested that market-led growth alone has not been enough to achieve inclusive and sustainable development. It is further suggested that a combination of measures is needed to reduce inequalities of outcome and opportunity, including the enhancement of social protection, the promotion of productive and decent work, the introduction of a progressive tax system and the strengthening of evidence-based policymaking through more and better research and data collection.

The Committee is invited to review the issues and proposed policy recommendations in the present document and provide the secretariat with guidance for its future work in the area of inequality, including gender disparities, particularly in the light of the development agenda beyond 2015.

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I. Introduction

1. As the development agenda beyond 2015 takes shape, there is growing recognition by the international community of the powerful and corrosive effects of inequalities on sustainable development. The outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and the Secretary-General's High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda both underscored the importance of addressing inequality.[1] Moreover, the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development

[1] Outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 20 to 22 June 2012, entitled "The future we want" (General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex); High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development*. Available from www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/UN-Report.pdf. See pp. 16-17.

Goals has identified inequality as both a stand-alone and cross-cutting issue.[2] Inequalities in Asia and the Pacific in particular were considered by government delegations and stakeholders to be a priority area in several past forums, including the recently concluded Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development.[3]

2. Despite high and enduring economic growth and significant progress in terms of poverty eradication, inequalities persist in Asia and the Pacific, and in some instances have intensified, between women and men, girls and boys, urban and rural areas, and different age and ethnic groups.[4] These multiple inequalities reinforce each other creating "an inequality trap" that disproportionately affects women and the most vulnerable members of society, including the poor, youth, persons with disabilities, migrants and older persons.

3. The Asia-Pacific region as a whole has had considerable success in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, particularly in reducing levels of poverty.[5] Yet, the framework for those Goals did not fully address the various forms of inequality, nor their structural underpinnings.[6]

4. Given this context, the present document is aimed at examining the different forms and pathways of inequality and their implications for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific. It also suggests key policy measures for reducing inequality that countries may want to consider. Since the third session of the ESCAP Committee on Social Development is serving as a preparatory body for the Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+20 Review (17-20 November 2014), particular attention has been given to the gender dimensions of inequality.

II. Why does inequality matter?

5. **Inequality is an impediment to poverty reduction.** High levels of inequality make it more difficult to reduce poverty through growth.[7] It has been estimated, for instance, that, had income inequality not increased in China, the poverty headcount rate (using the $1.25-a-day poverty line) would have been reduced to 5 per cent in 2008, instead of stalling at 13 per cent. Similarly, in India, the poverty rate would have declined to 30 per cent, instead of remaining at 33 per cent; and in Indonesia, it would have declined to 6 per cent, instead of 16 per cent.[8] In other words, in terms of absolute numbers, had inequality not increased, an additional 128 million people

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2 Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, "Introduction and proposed goals and targets on sustainable development for the Post-2015 Development Agenda", Zero Draft. Available from http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html.

3 "Chair's summary", Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, Pattaya, Thailand, 19-21 May 2014. For details of the meeting, see www.unescap.org/events/apfsd.

4 Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Asian Development Bank and United Nations Development Programme, *Asia-Pacific Aspirations: Perspectives for a Post-2015 Development Agenda. Asia-Pacific Regional MDGs Report 2012/13*. Available from www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/MDG-Report2012-2013%28lowres%29_0.pdf.

5 Ibid.

6 See United Nations Millennium Declaration (General Assembly resolution 55/2).

7 *Combating Poverty and Inequality: Structural Change, Social Policy and Politics* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.III.Y.1).

8 Asian Development Bank, *Asian Development Outlook 2012: Confronting Rising Inequality in Asia* (Manila, ADB, 2012), p. 41.

would have been lifted out of poverty in China. In India this number would have been 24 million and in Indonesia, 37 million.[9]

6. **Inequality adversely affects economic growth**. Unequal societies constrain the productive capacity of the poor and thus their potential contribution to growth. In highly unequal societies, the poor are more likely to be locked into a subsistence economy and have limited disposable income for the purchase of manufactured goods. This dynamic generates lower effective aggregate demand in the economy, limiting the size of the domestic market.[10]

7. **High inequality also contributes to social instability**. A growing divide between the rich and the poor is often a factor in rising levels of crime and social unrest, as it undermines trust and weakens bonds of solidarity.[11] Under certain conditions, inequality can also lead to political instability. In extreme cases, especially where inequality is manifested along ethnic lines, it can lead to conflict and failure of the State.[12]

8. **Inequality can undermine environmental sustainability**. In equal societies with a high degree of social cohesion, people tend to work together to protect global public goods, including the environment. In contrast, in societies where inequality abounds, collective action is trumped by the pursuit of individual or group interest. In such societies, there is less public support for policies designed to protect the environment and "govern the commons".[13]

III. What drives inequality?

9. **Technological change and globalization are considered by some analysts to be the main drivers of the region's rapid growth as well as the basic forces behind rising inequality.**[14] Technological change and globalization have favoured skilled over unskilled labour, capital over labour, and urban and coastal areas over rural and inland regions. One manifestation of this interplay is that economic growth is not generating sufficient decent and productive employment opportunities, as evidenced by the large and underproductive agricultural sector in many countries, as well as the high share of workers in the informal economy.[15] Another manifestation is the unequal access to science, technology and innovation. This dynamic is exemplified by the "digital divide" that exists between and within countries in the region.[16]

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9 ESCAP calculations.

10 *Inequality Matters: Report on the World Social Situation* (United Nations publication, Sales No. 13.IV.2); and *Asian Development Outlook 2012*.

11 Sameer Khatiwada, "Social unrest index: an overview", International Institute for Labour Studies Discussion Paper, No. 215, forthcoming.

12 *Combating Poverty and Inequality: Structural Change, Social Policy and Politics* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.III.Y.1).

13 Joseph Stiglitz, "Inequality & environmental policy", Resources 2020 lecture, 5 October 2012 (Washington, D.C.); Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1990).

14 Asian Development Bank, *Asian Development Outlook 2012* (Manila, ADB, 2012).

15 *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2013* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.13.II.F.2).

16 Refer to the work of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development, a regional institute of ESCAP based in Incheon, Republic of Korea, see www.unapcict.org.

10. **Some of the policies that have dominated the development agenda since the 1980s have exacerbated inequalities in the region.**[17] Designed to create a "race to efficiency" through market incentives, these policies have, in certain contexts, created a "race to the bottom". Such policies include financial liberalization, regressive taxation, privatization in the context of weak regulation, public expenditure policies that fail to protect the poor during crises or adjustment periods and labour market policies that lead to precarious forms of employment.

11. **Inequality is also perpetuated in and through discriminatory political, legal and sociocultural norms, based on gender, ethnicity, race and language.** These discriminatory structures disproportionately affect women and vulnerable population groups, excluding them from civic and political life, undermining their access to land, asset ownership, credit, education, health services and other resources needed for leading a productive life.[18]

IV. What forms does inequality take?

12. In order to do justice to its multifaceted nature, the many forms and pathways of inequality need to be considered. These can be divided into four main types:

(a) Inequality in income;

(b) Inequality in access to health care;

(c) Inequality in access to education;

(d) Inequality across key population groups.

A. Income inequality remains high

13. During the last two decades income inequality, as measured by the Palma index,[19] has increased in Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia and Sri Lanka (see figure 1). In contrast, it has decreased in Armenia, Cambodia, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, the Russian Federation, Thailand and Turkey. It should also be pointed out that in China and Sri Lanka income inequality rose strongly over the 1990s, but has been falling slightly since 2000 in the case of Sri Lanka and since about 2004 in China. Particularly in China, social protection

[17] *Combating Poverty and Inequality: Structural Change, Social Policy and Politics* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.III.Y.1).

[18] *Report on the World Social Situation 2013: Inequality Matters* (United Nations publication, Sales No. 13.IV.2).

[19] The Gini coefficient is the most commonly used indicator to measure income inequality. Recently, arguments have been made in favour of an alternative measure – the "Palma index" – which measures the ratio of the income share of the top 10 per cent to the bottom 40 per cent of a country's population. The Palma index offers a way to more intuitively understand income inequality. For a given elevated Palma value, it is clear that the gap between rich and poor can be reduced either by raising the share of national income of the poorest 40 per cent or decreasing the share of the top 10 per cent. See Alex Cobham and Andy Sumner, "Putting the Gini back in the bottle? 'The Palma' as a policy-relevant measure of inequality", working paper, King's International Development Institute (London, King's College, 2013). See also, José G. Palma, "Homogeneous middles vs. heterogeneous tails, and the end of the 'Inverted-U': it's all about the share of the rich", *Development and Change*, vol. 42, No. 1 (January 2011), pp. 87-153.

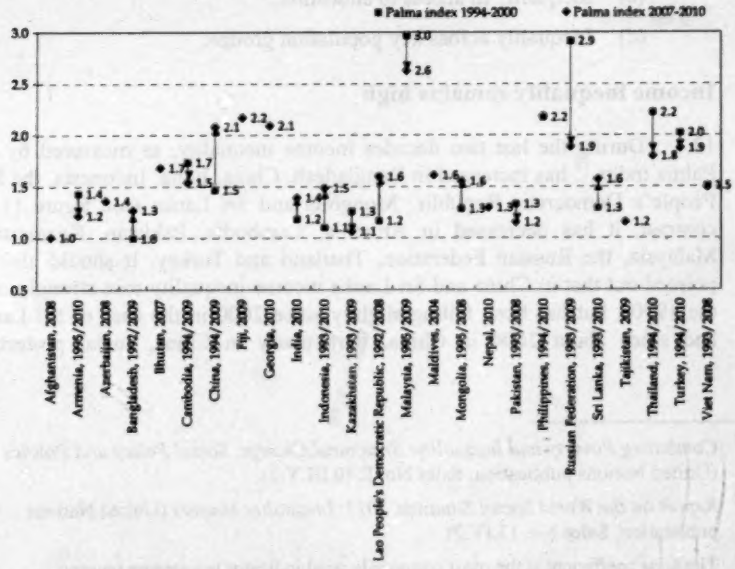
policies aimed at increasing the income of the poor may have contributed to reversing this trend.[20]

14. An analysis of each income decile over time confirms the basic idea behind the Palma index, namely that change usually occurs in the highest and lowest quintiles, while the share of the middle quintiles remains relatively stable in the majority of countries. This suggests that over time the rich and poor both may be getting better off; yet, because the rich are getting disproportionately richer, the gap between the rich and the poor is increasing. The figure for China in the annex illustrates how there was a sharp increase in the income share of the highest income decile over the 1990s in this country, while the income share of the lowest decile fell. In contrast, the income share of the middle classes remained relatively stable.

15. There are, however, some notable cases where changes in income inequality can be attributed to a rise of the middle classes. In Thailand, where overall inequality has fallen over time, the income share of the top income decile has decreased since about 2000, giving space to the rise of the middle classes and lower income groups. In like fashion, in Cambodia, the income share, particularly of the highest income decile, has decreased sharply since about 2007; while the share of the fifth and sixth income deciles – the middle classes – rose, and the share of the poorest group remained relatively stable.

Figure 1

The richest 10 per cent have almost twice as much income as the poorest 40 per cent: Palma index in selected Asian and Pacific countries, 1994-2010



Source: ESCAP calculations based on World Bank's PovCalNet.

16. A structural factor explaining the persistent – and at times increasing – gap between rich and poor is that in the last decades the income of capital owners has grown faster than the income of workers in the major economies in the region. As a result, the labour income share has fallen. For example, although wages in China roughly tripled over the last decade, GDP increased

[20] International Labour Organization, *World of Work Report 2014: Developing with Jobs* (Geneva, 2014).

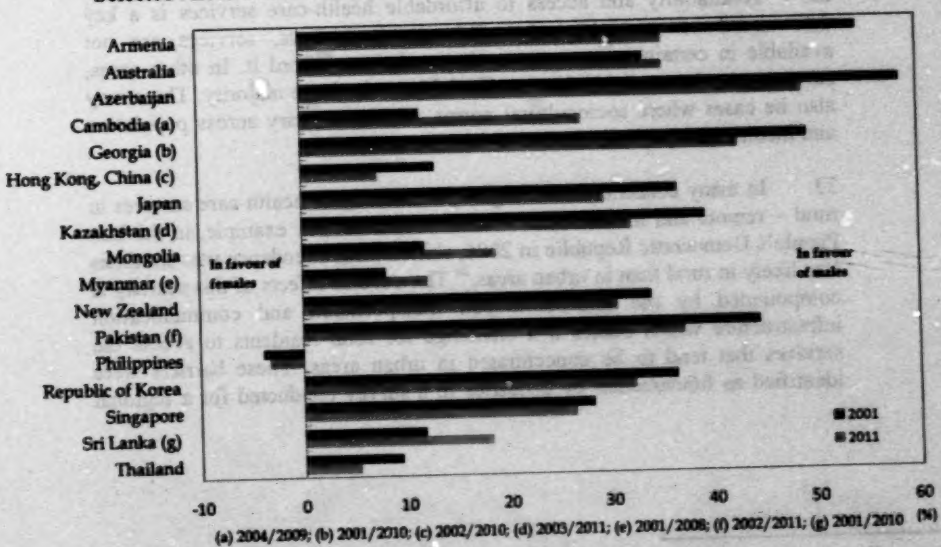
faster than the total wage bill, thus leading to a decrease in the labour income share. There have been similar trends in the Republic of Korea and Turkey.[21]

17. Agricultural wages in particular have grown at a slower pace than wages in other sectors, reinforcing and even exacerbating inequalities between rural and urban areas. This is the case in China, for instance, where wages in the agricultural sector have grown significantly slower than overall wages, including wages in the industrial sector. In many countries in the region, moreover, the share of the labour force working in agriculture does not proportionally correspond to the agricultural sector's share in GDP.[22] This implies low productivity and wages. For instance, in India and Nepal more than half the labour force is employed in agriculture, whereas the share of agriculture in GDP is 14 per cent and 35 per cent respectively. In Papua New Guinea, about 90 per cent of the labour force is occupied in rural areas, whereas the agricultural sector accounts for only 36 per cent of GDP.

18. Significant income inequalities between men and women abound in Asia and the Pacific. Figure 2 depicts the uneven progress that has been made over the past decade in closing the gender wage gap across the region. The gender wage gap is particularly high in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Pakistan. In contrast, in the Philippines this gap is negative, that is, women on average receive a higher income than men. Moreover, while the gap has fallen in several economies, such as Armenia; Azerbaijan; Georgia; Hong Kong, China; and Thailand, it has increased or remained the same in other economies where data are available.

Figure 2
The gender wage gap is still high, but falling in some economies

Selected Asian-Pacific economies, 2001 and 2011



(a) 2004/2009; (b) 2001/2010; (c) 2002/2010; (d) 2003/2011; (e) 2001/2008; (f) 2002/2011; (g) 2001/2010

Source: ESCAP Online Statistical Database

[21] International Labour Organization, *Global Wage Report 2012/13: Wages and Equitable Growth* (Geneva, 2013), p. 42.

[22] *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2013* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.13.II.F.2), p. 159.

19. The gender wage gap persists in part because women are more likely to be in vulnerable employment than their male counterparts: in East Asia, 52.7 per cent of women are engaged in vulnerable employment, compared with 45.4 per cent of men; in South-East Asia and the Pacific, the corresponding percentages are 65.9 and 58.5; and in South Asia, the figures are 83.8 per cent and 75.5 per cent respectively.[23] Moreover, the need to combine work with childcare often pushes women into insecure jobs in the informal sector. It also needs to be mentioned that in the Asian and Pacific region in 2012, 28.9 per cent of females were engaged as contributing family workers compared with 9.2 per cent of males.[24]

20. Several countries in the region have already taken measures to address increasing income inequality by introducing cash transfers for the poor and other vulnerable groups. For example, to facilitate the transition from a planned to a market economy, China established minimum living standard guarantee schemes (*dibao* in Chinese), which provide means-tested cash transfers to those living under the established minimal standard of living; and India developed a scheme under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, which guarantees 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to any rural household whose adult members are willing to participate in unskilled manual work.[25]

B. Poor access to health-care services exacerbates inequality

21. In addition to income inequality, there are also inequalities that stem from unequal access to the resources required to sustain and improve livelihoods and lead meaningful lives. Such inequalities take form principally through unequal access to health services and education.

22. Availability and access to affordable health-care services is a key determinant of inequality of well-being. Sometimes, services are not available in certain areas, even to those who can afford it. In other cases, services may be available, but unaffordable to the large majority. There may also be cases where sociocultural norms, which can vary across population and income groups, limit the use of health-care services.

23. In many countries in the region, availability of health-care services in rural – remote and mountainous – areas is limited. For example, in the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 2006, skilled birth attendance was six times less likely in rural than in urban areas.[26] The adverse effects of this scarcity is compounded by the underdeveloped transportation and communication infrastructure which makes it a challenge for rural residents to access the services that tend to be concentrated in urban areas. These barriers were identified as fundamental by countries in a survey conducted for a regional

[23] International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends 2012: Preventing a Deeper Jobs Crisis* (Geneva, 2012), p. 11.

[24] *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2013* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.13.II.F.1), p.147.

[25] For a more detailed overview of these and other income support schemes see Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Income Support in Asia and the Pacific* (Bangkok, ESCAP, forthcoming).

[26] World Health Organization, Global Health Observatory – Resources. Available from http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.resources (accessed 5 June 2014).

review of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.[27]

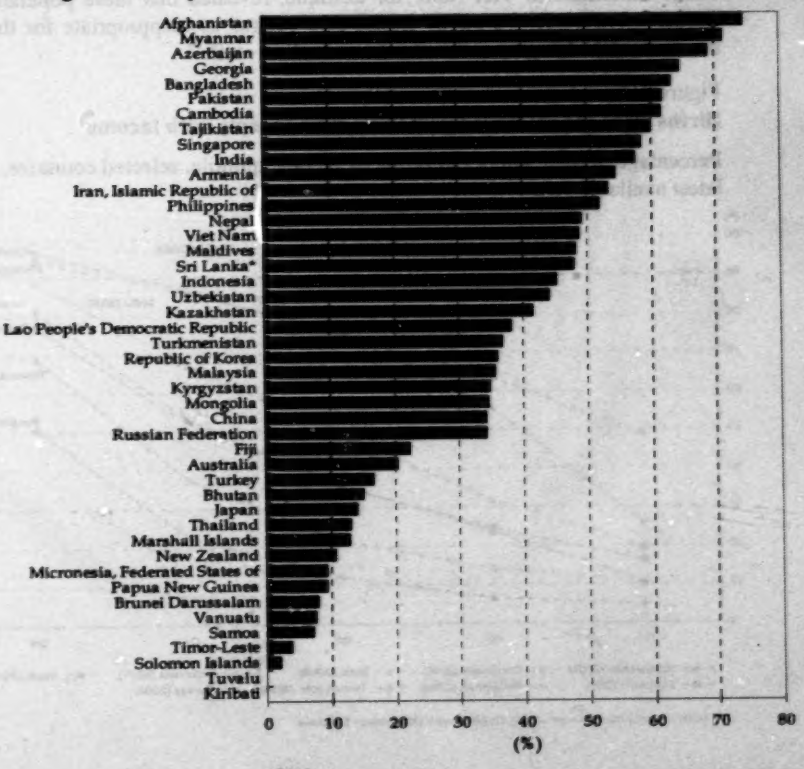
24. An indicator to measure the affordability of health-care services is out-of-pocket expenditure as a percentage of total health expenditure. When out-of-pocket expenditures exceed a certain threshold, they limit people's access to health care. Often, poorer households can access such services only after detrimental reductions have been made to other expenditures, such as education and nutrition. Owing to high out-of-pocket expenditure, moreover, people may not seek care when needed.

25. In several countries in the region, more than half the total health expenditure originates from private households. In Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and Myanmar, private households bear even more than two thirds of total health expenditure, making health care difficult to afford for lower income groups (figure 3).

Figure 3

Out-of-pocket health expenditures remain high in a third of Asia-Pacific countries

Percentage of total expenditure on health, 2012



*2011

Source: World Health Organization National Health Account Database

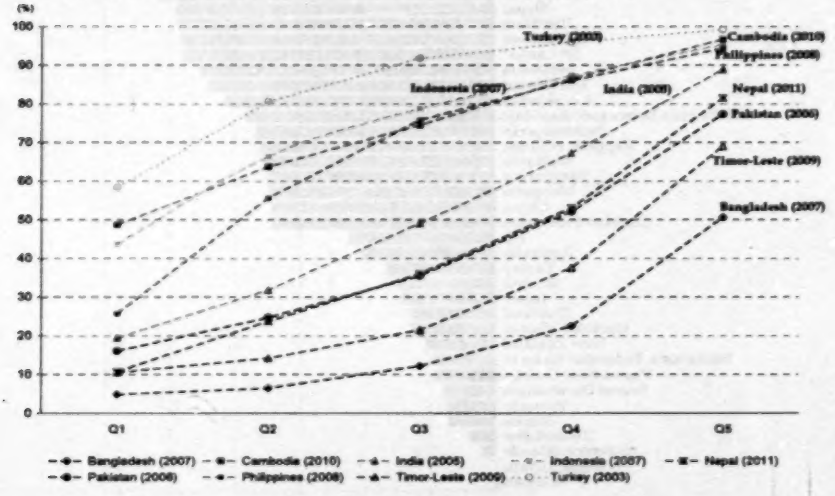
[27] Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014, *Sustaining Progress on Population and Development in Asia and the Pacific: 20 Years after ICPD* (ST/ESCAP/2670) (Bangkok, ESCAP and ICPD beyond 2014, 2014).

26. In several countries, income seems to be a strong factor determining access to reproductive health services. In India, for example, the percentage of births attended by skilled personnel increases almost proportionally with income. In countries such as Bangladesh and Nepal, skilled birth attendance remains scarce in the lower four income quintiles, with a significant increase between the fourth and fifth quintile (see figure 4). In these two countries, improvements over time have taken place mainly in the highest income quintile. For instance, in Bangladesh in 1996, 1.8 per cent of births in the lowest income quintile were attended by skilled personnel, compared with 29.7 per cent in the highest quintile. In 2011, these figures had increased to 4.9 and 50.6 respectively. In other countries, such as the Philippines and Turkey, the lack of attendance of skilled personnel at births seems to prevail only in the lowest income quintile.[28]

27. Sociocultural and language barriers, moreover, are additional reasons why people may not use health-care services. Country responses to the aforementioned ICPD survey stated that "limited cultural acceptability" was as an important barrier, particularly when it comes to using sexual and reproductive health services.[29] A study on the use of health-care services by ethnic minorities in Viet Nam, for example, revealed that these population groups often perceived public health-care centres as inappropriate for their needs and faced negative attitudes from medical staff.[30]

Figure 4
Births attended by skilled personnel rises sharply with income

Percentage of total number of births by income quintile, selected countries, latest available year



Source: World Health Organization Global Health Observatory Database

[28] S.M. Abul Bashar, "Determinants of the use of skilled birth attendants at delivery by pregnant women in Bangladesh", Master's degree thesis, Department of Public Health and Clinical Medicine, Umea University, Sweden, 2012.

[29] Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014, *Sustaining Progress on Population and Development in Asia and the Pacific* (ST/ESCAP/2670) (Bangkok, ESCAP and ICPD beyond 2014, 2014).

[30] Bettina Schwind, "Barriers to health care for the poor and ethnic minorities in Vietnam", Discussion Papers on Social Protection, No. 2 (Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), 2010).

28. In an attempt to reduce inequalities, several countries in the region, including China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Korea and Thailand, as well as some least developed countries, are providing universal access to health-care services. While some countries have opted for public provision of services, others have introduced public insurance or other financing options. For example, in Solomon Islands, out-of-pocket expenditures are among the lowest in the region due to a system of public health-care provision under which all general out-patient services and hospitalization are free of charge. Bhutan has also aimed at achieving universal access through the Bhutan Health Trust Fund, and by charging for non-essential health-care services.[31] Cambodia's quest for universal health coverage has moved forward through the innovative health equity funds, which now cover more than three quarters of all citizens living below the poverty line.[32]

29. Countries in the region, moreover, are taking action to expand access to health-care services, including sexual and reproductive health services, in rural areas. While most countries focus on expanding service delivery, 45 per cent of the countries that responded to the ICPD survey sought to create demand through cash transfers.[33] For instance, the Government of Bangladesh has recently introduced a system of demand-side financing that furnishes vouchers to women who use antenatal care.[34]

C. Lack of access to education further accentuates inequalities

30. Despite the remarkable progress that has been achieved in improving overall access to education, as many as 18 million children of primary school age are not in school. The region, moreover, has three of the world's top five largest out-of-school populations: namely in Pakistan (5.4 million in 2011); India (1.7 million in 2010); and the Philippines (1.5 million in 2009). Often it is children living in war-stricken areas or isolated communities, or those belonging to ethnic minorities or with disabilities that have less access to education.[35]

31. Disparities in terms of the quality of primary education are particularly prominent between countries in the region. For instance, in a 2011 study of 52 school systems from across the globe, the top four performers in fourth-grade mathematics came from Asia and the Pacific namely: China; Hong Kong, China; Republic of Korea; and Singapore. The majority of fourth-grade students in these school systems achieved a "high

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[31] Bhutan, "National Health Policy," Ministry of Health, Royal Government of Bhutan. Available from www.nationalplanningcycles.org/sites/default/files/country_docs/Bhutan/pages.pdf (accessed 27 May 2014).

[32] Mathieu Noirhomme and others, "Improving access to health care services for the poorest: the case of health equity funds", Université de Montréal, July 2009.

[33] Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014, *Sustaining Progress on Population and Development in Asia and the Pacific* (ST/ESCAP/2670) (Bangkok, ESCAP and ICPD beyond 2014, 2014).

[34] S. M. Abul Bashar, "Determinants of the use of skilled birth attendants at delivery by pregnant women in Bangladesh", Master's degree thesis, Umeå International School of Public Health, Umeå University, Sweden, 2012.

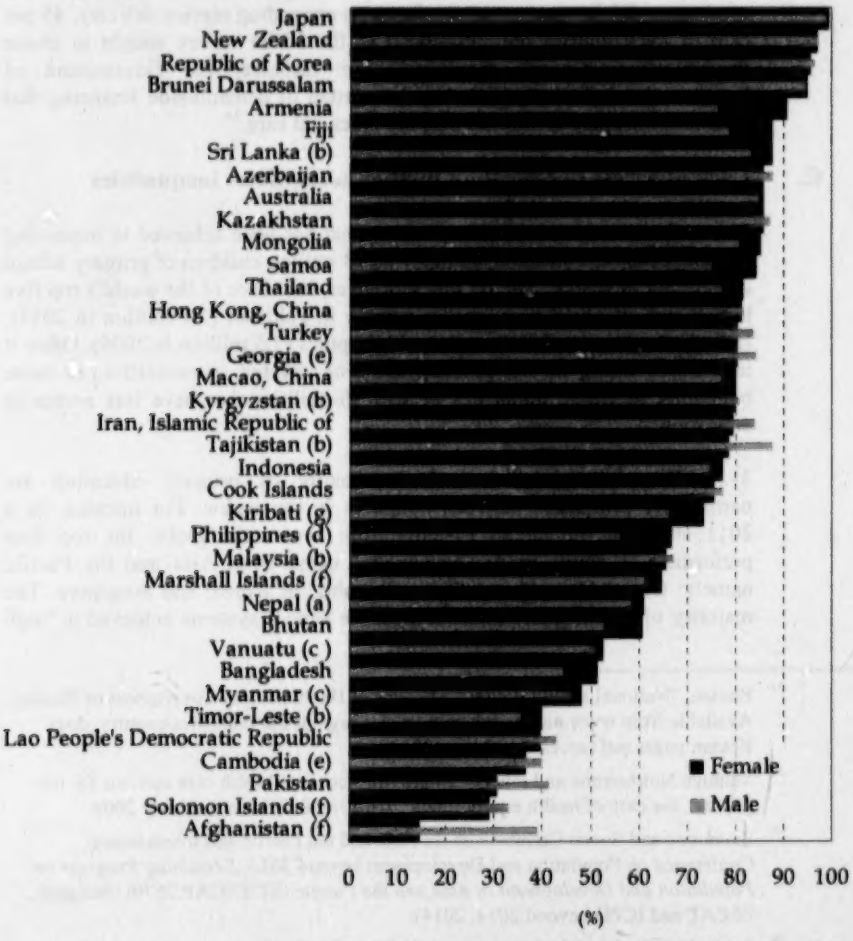
[35] Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Asian Development Bank and United Nations Development Programme, *Asia-Pacific Aspirations: Perspectives for a Post-2015 Development Agenda, Asia-Pacific Regional MDGs Report 2012/13*. Available from www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/MDG-Report2012-2013%28lowres%29_0.pdf, p. 34.

benchmark". In contrast, in a number of countries in the region, as many as one in five students failed to achieve the "low benchmark". These countries included Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Thailand.[36]

32. Inequalities in access to education within countries become more pronounced in secondary and tertiary education. There are still several countries in the region where more than half of children or young people are not in secondary school. Generally, countries with high levels of secondary enrolment have also closed gender gaps. Inversely, in several of those countries where secondary enrolments are low, the gender gap is relatively large.

Figure 5
Enrollment rates are closely linked to the income of the country

Secondary education, 2012



(a) Data refer to 2013; (b) 2011; (c) 2010; (d) 2009; (e) 2008; (f) 2007; (g) 2005

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database

[36] Ibid, p. 34-35.

33. There are also several economies where significantly more girls than boys are enrolled in secondary education, such as in Armenia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Fiji, Mongolia, Samoa, the Philippines and Thailand (see figure 5). In Bangladesh, girls outnumber boys, particularly in rural areas.[37] This country's female stipend programme, which is aimed at promoting rural girls' secondary education, may be among the drivers of this reverse gender imbalance.[38]

34. Differences also prevail in rural areas for girls' secondary enrolment rates, which are lagging significantly behind boys' enrolments and girls' enrolment in urban areas. For example, in Nepal surveys in 2001 revealed that in rural areas only 59 per cent of girls between 11 and 15 years of age were enrolled in school, compared with 80.2 per cent of boys in rural areas and 81.3 of girls in urban areas.[39]

35. Educational completion tends to be lower among low-income groups, particularly in times of crisis, when poor households are often pressed to take their children out of school due to financial constraints. The table below shows that, for most countries in the region, average years of education tend to increase with income level. In some countries, moreover, there are significant gender gaps in average years of schooling in the lower income quintiles, but these gender gaps decrease or diminish in higher income quintiles.

Table
Number of years in school increases with family income
Select countries, 2005

	Q1 (lowest)		Q2		Q3		Q4		Q5 (highest)	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Armenia	8.3	8.1	8.8	9.2	9.3	9.0	9.5	9.6	9.6	10.1
Azerbaijan	9.4	10.1	10.1	10.3	10.4	11.0	10.9	11.1	11.4	11.4
Bangladesh	3.5	3.8	4.5	4.8	5.6	5.6	6.6	6.8	8.1	8.0
Cambodia	2.8	4.0	3.7	4.9	4.7	5.8	5.8	6.9	7.8	8.7
Georgia	10.6	10.2	11.2	11.0	11.3	11.4	12.0	11.7	12.7	12.4
India	3.0	5.7	5.0	7.2	7.3	8.4	9.2	9.5	11.2	11.1
Indonesia	6.7	6.6	7.9	7.8	9.0	9.0	10.0	10.0	11.0	11.3
Kazakhstan	11.6	11.2	12.1	11.4	12.4	11.9	12.8	12.5	13.4	13.1
Kyrgyzstan	10.5	10.4	10.6	10.4	10.6	10.4	10.7	10.4	11.0	10.8
Lao People's Democratic Republic	4.5	7.4	8.6	9.0	8.3	9.0	7.6	9.0	8.2	8.0
Myanmar	3.4	3.8	4.5	4.9	5.5	5.6	6.6	6.5	7.7	7.7
Nepal	2.4	5.0	3.3	5.6	4.3	6.4	5.9	7.4	8.2	9.3
Pakistan	1.1	3.8	2.3	5.0	4.4	6.2	6.4	7.3	8.8	9.1
Philippines	7.1	5.8	8.9	7.7	9.9	9.0	10.9	9.9	11.0	11.0
Tajikistan	8.6	9.8	8.6	10.1	9.2	10.1	9.2	10.3	10.3	11.3
Turkey	5.2	7.4	7.4	9.0	8.4	9.2	7.4	8.7	8.9	9.4
Viet Nam	5.2	5.3	7.8	7.8	8.5	8.8	9.5	9.2	10.2	10.7

Source: UNESCO, Deprivation and Marginalization in Education (DME) database

[37] ICF International, DHS Program STAT compiler. Available from www.statcompiler.com (accessed 25 May 2014).

[38] Shahidur Khandker, Mark Pitt and Nobuhiko Fuwa, "Subsidy to promote girls' secondary education: the female stipend program in Bangladesh", Munich Personal (MPRA) MPRA Paper No. 23688, March 2013.

[39] ICF International, DHS Program STAT compiler. Available from www.statcompiler.com (accessed 25 May 2014).

36. School completion also varies between different regions of a country. The educational completion rates are significantly lower in less developed and peripheral regions than in more developed regions.[40]

37. Social inequalities tend to lead to uneven access to education, resulting in lower educational outcomes, which in turn result in lower earnings, and thereby cementing the circle between inequality in income and inequality in opportunity. These factors have a tendency to mutually reinforce each other. In order to reduce these inequalities, particular attention has to be given to improving access to good-quality education for socially disadvantaged groups.

38. Many countries have already made efforts to increase female school attendance through, for instance, cash transfers conditional on school attendance of girls in the household. Several countries have also improved the overall quality of education. For example, in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009 study of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which measured the skills in mathematics, reading and science of secondary students, Indonesia was identified as one of the countries that had made the most progress since 2000. These overall improvements are largely attributed to improvements among the lowest income groups.[41] New Zealand, moreover, has made progress in improving early childhood education for Maori children, involving Maori communities in curriculum development, and Maori language speakers in teaching, thus responding better to the needs of indigenous children.[42]

D. Inequalities persist across key population groups, in particular for women and girls

39. Characteristics that identify a social group to which an individual belongs, including gender, age, ethnicity, disability or migrant status, also have considerable influence on well-being and economic outcomes.[43]

40. These group or horizontal inequalities are reinforced by lack of voice and power and impede the full and free participation of all persons in civic and political life. This in turn undermines good governance and the capability of all people to be agents of sustainable development. Beyond individual exclusion, inequalities in power, voice and participation threaten economic growth and national stability by weakening social bonds, undermining environmental sustainability and feeding disengagement and dissent.

41. It is important to address horizontal inequalities because they constitute a large component of overall inequalities within countries. In the region, women and girls, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities and international migrants are particularly susceptible to social exclusion. In the

[40] Asian Development Bank and United Nations Children's Fund, *Non-State Providers and Public-Private Partnerships in Education for the Poor* (ADB and UNICEF, 2011), p. 9.

[41] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *PISA 2009 Results: Learning Trends – Changes in Student Performance Since 2000* (Paris, OECD, 2010).

[42] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Reaching the Marginalized: Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010* (Oxford and Paris, Oxford University Press and UNESCO, 2010).

[43] *Inequality Matters: Report on the World Social Situation* (United Nations publication, Sales No. 13.IV.2).

rest of this section there will be a discussion of the particular disadvantages women and girls face in a large number of Asia-Pacific countries.

42. In their diversity, women and girls across Asia and the Pacific are connected by inequality, discrimination and oppressive gender stereotypes. Deriving from the unequal distribution of power between women and men, and the associated greater sociocultural value attached to males than to females, gender inequalities pervade.

43. In terms of economic power and participation, gender-based inequalities of opportunity and outcome prevail. Women encounter direct and indirect discrimination in pursuing livelihoods, reflected in higher rates of unemployment, lower rates of labour force participation (such as 67.7 per cent for women compared with 89.5 per cent adult men in South-East Asia and the Pacific), lower employment-to-population ratios for women, than for men (for example 30.4 per cent for women compared with 78.5 per cent for men in South Asia)[44] and the enduring gender wage gap discussed above.[45] For female own-account workers, moreover, inequalities are manifested in limited access to property, assets and credit, or access being conditional on the existence of a male guarantor.[46]

44. With occupational segregation drawing upon traditional and restrictive gender roles, women predominate in vulnerable employment, characterized by low-pay, low productivity, restricted occupational options and little, if any, social protection.[47] While discriminatory and oppressive gender stereotypes and sociocultural norms confine women to catering, caring, cashiering, clerical and cleaning work, de jure discrimination reinforces inequalities between women and men. This is manifested, for example, by policies and/or legislation where women are treated as minors and thus denied legal property and inheritance rights;[48] legislation that is devoid of maternity protection measures;[49] legislation that does not cover the groups of workers where the majority are women; and the absence of legislative protection against sexual harassment and other forms of violence.[50]

45. Promisingly, however, gender-based inequalities are recognized and commitment to their elimination exists across Asia and the Pacific. The foundation for achieving equality between women and men has been established with almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Gender equality has also been advanced by existing action agendas, most notably the Beijing

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[44] International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends for Women* (Geneva, ILO, 2012).

[45] International Labour Organization, "Equality at work: the continuing challenge", Report of the Director-General, International Labour Conference, 100th session, Geneva, 1-17 June 2011.

[46] Economist Intelligence Unit, "Women's economic opportunity 2012: a global index and ranking" (London, EIU, 2012).

[47] International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends for Women* (Geneva, ILO, 2012).

[48] Sylvia Chant and Carolyn Pedwell, Women, gender and the informal economy: an assessment of ILO research and suggested ways forward (Geneva, ILO, 2008).

[49] International Labour Organization, "Equality at work: the continuing challenge", Report of the Director-General, International Labour Conference, 100th session, Geneva, 1-17 June 2011.

[50] Ibid.

Declaration and Platform for Action, and the outcome document of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

V. What can be done to tackle inequalities?

46. Measures to address inequalities tend to be framed from two different perspectives: the first perspective is concerned primarily with *inequality of outcomes* in the material dimensions of human well-being, such as the level of income or level of educational attainment; the second is concerned principally with *inequality of opportunities*, such as unequal access to employment, education or political processes.[51]

47. These two perspectives are based on different understandings of the relationship between outcomes and opportunities. Will higher incomes lead to improved opportunities, or will greater opportunity lead to improved outcomes? Should the aim of policies be to redistribute income, or to create a more level playing field? Framing the discussion in this way, however, is based on a false dichotomy as outcomes and opportunities are in fact interdependent: equal outcomes cannot be achieved without equal opportunities, and equal opportunities cannot be achieved with unequal starting points.

48. A broad set of complementary social and economic policies thus need to be designed to address both outcome and opportunity inequality. With this in mind, three policy measures are proposed for the consideration of the Committee: namely enhancing social protection; strengthening redistributive policies through the tax system; and ensuring decent and productive work. Furthermore, the Committee is encouraged to consider strengthening research and improving data collection in support of evidence-based policymaking aimed at reducing inequalities.

A. Enhance social protection

49. In the last decade, social protection has emerged as a critical development instrument in Asia and the Pacific. Originally understood exclusively in terms of poverty reduction, today social protection is being integrated into broader national economic and social development policies. Social protection is anchored in the universal rights of everyone to social security, and to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of themselves and their families. In addition to fulfilling basic rights, social protection is also an investment in the future. By generating resilience, equity and opportunity, social protection establishes a solid foundation for both social and economic development, and as such it is a fundamental pillar of inclusive and sustainable development. Social protection addresses not only the symptoms of poverty and inequality, but also some of their underlying structural causes. It plays a transformative role in contributing to long-term inclusive and sustainable development.

50. Social protection improves equality at both national and local levels by reducing poverty and destitution, with strong support for people working in the informal sector and for key populations, including women and girls, migrants and persons with disabilities. Equally important, by addressing social and economic inequalities across population groups and generations, social protection contributes to social and political stability within countries. Social protection then is a source of social integration. It is based on

[51] United Nations Development Programme, *Humanity Divided: Confronting Inequality in Developing Countries* (New York, UNDP, 2014).

solidarity – on the principle that society as a whole accepts the responsibility to provide those in greatest need with basic levels of benefits and services.

51. Social protection promotes the opportunity to improve people's productivity and incomes, through preserving and building their human capital and through access to better jobs and income, which can propel them out of poverty.[52] With a more secure foundation, and with greater security against the risk of failure, individuals and families can invest in their own futures and have greater confidence to engage in economic activity, beyond ensuring basic economic survival in order to meet their own basic needs and the needs of those who are dependent upon them.[53] By promoting opportunities and generating income then social protection can stabilize the economy by providing replacement income that smoothes consumption in recessions and thus prevents a deepening of recessions due to collapsing consumer confidence and its negative effects on domestic demand.[54]

52. In recognizing the central role of social protection in economic and social development, countries in Asia and the Pacific have made substantial progress in strengthening this dimension. Indonesia, for example, embodied a rights-based approach to social protection through constitutional amendments in 2002. Thailand now hosts a universal health-care system, ensuring that all Thais have free access to health care. Health coverage is expanding quickly in China where authorities have made great progress in providing health care for everyone. In Sri Lanka, elementary and secondary education is compulsory and provided free of charge. Children in the Philippines have improved access to nutrition. Working-age groups below the poverty line in India are guaranteed employment up to 100 days a year, and all older persons in Maldives and Samoa now have access to a non-contributory pension.[55]

53. Despite the progress that has been made, important social protection coverage gaps remain. Lack of fiscal space results in poor availability and quality of public social services and low levels of social protection benefits. In addition, demographic and social changes and increasingly frequent and intense natural and economic crises challenge the viability of social protection systems. Only 30 per cent of persons above the retirement age receive an old-age pension. Only 10 per cent of the unemployed receive any benefits. Only 30 per cent of all persons with disabilities have enough income for self-support. In addition, more than 1 billion people are employed in the informal sector and lack basic social protection and so too do the large majority of migrants. Furthermore, 80 per cent of the population has no access to health-care assistance. These coverage gaps present a major opportunity for countries in Asia and the Pacific to strengthen social protection systems.[56]

54. Implementing the social protection floor (SPF) initiative is an effective strategy for moving towards broader and more robust social

[52] World Bank, *Resilience, Equity and Opportunity: Social Protection and Labour Strategy* (New York, 2013).

[53] *The Promise of Protection: Social Protection and Development in Asia and the Pacific* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.11.II.F.5).

[54] International Labour Organization, "Social protection as a productive factor", Committee on Employment and Social Policy, ILO, Geneva, November 2005.

[55] See ESCAP database of social protection good practices. Available from www.socialprotection-toolbox.org.

[56] Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Building on the Promise: Experiences in Strengthening Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific* (Bangkok, forthcoming).

protection coverage. The SPF framework corresponds to a set of essential social services and income security measures that all persons everywhere should enjoy in order to ensure the realization of the rights embodied in human right treaties. The essential social services and income security along the life course or components of the SPF framework ensure that all in need have access to social services in the area of health and income security for children, as well as working-age and older persons.

55. At the sixty-seventh Commission session in May 2011, members and associate members of ESCAP endorsed SPF by adopting a resolution on strengthening social protection systems in Asia and the Pacific. That resolution calls upon member States to "invest in building social protection systems that might form the basis of a 'social protection floor', which would offer a minimum level of access to essential services and income security for all, and subsequently enhancing the capacity for extension, according to national aspirations and circumstances".[57]

56. SPF represents a move from a fragmented approach towards an integrated system of social protection. The SPF framework facilitates the implementation of a guaranteed basic social protection package for all and should be prioritized over an ad hoc addition of new programmes for different conditions and population groups. Following the rights-based approach, these basic guarantees are grounded on a constitutional and legal framework.

57. Social protection, in such a framework, can be seen as being at the core of an integrated and holistic development policy rather than solely a response to crisis. Poverty and vulnerability in turn are addressed not as isolated and static issues but as multidimensional and interdependent experiences.

B. Promote productive and decent work

58. One reason why the Asia-Pacific region continues to experience persistent inequality is that economic growth is not generating sufficient productive and decent employment. This is due to the nature of growth and the pattern of structural change in many countries in which workers move from agriculture into low-productivity services. A consequence has been that many people are trapped in vulnerable employment, and economic insecurity has risen together with rapid growth.[58]

59. Pervasive vulnerable and underemployment hamper growth and development by reinforcing inequality of income and inequality between rural and urban areas. Low productivity levels, labour standards and the underutilization of a country's labour force usually indicate that its full growth potential is not being realized. Moreover, the inability of large proportions of the labour force to earn a safe and decent living limits their capacity to accumulate savings, leading to a low level of capital available for investment, thereby further hindering development. It also limits their ability to invest in their children's education, thereby increasing not only the vulnerability of current, but also of future, generations.

60. Although social protection in the form of social insurance and social assistance mitigates risks and supplements income for the poor and

[57] Commission resolution 67/8.

[58] *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2013* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.13.II.F.2).

marginalized, it does not draw on an important determinant of their vulnerability. Active labour market programmes, consisting of skill development and training initiatives, special work schemes and wage and employment subsidies, are not common in Asia and the Pacific. Expenditures on such programmes account for about 5 per cent of total spending on social protection. Although labour market programmes are gaining in prominence in some countries, particularly in South Asia, such countries remain small in number.[59]

61. Labour market programmes reshape and enhance the core asset of the poor and vulnerable, namely their labour. These programmes also enable the unemployed and underemployed to develop skills and enrich their human capital. Increased employability reduces labour market structural imbalances by better matching labourers to market demand. This virtuous circle facilitates the relocation of human capital from traditional, low productive sectors such as agriculture to higher productive sectors.

62. The positive impact of active labour market programmes on individuals and households has a positive spillover effect at the community level. As the Food-for-Work programme in Afghanistan illustrates, engaging households in productive public work, such as building local infrastructure in exchange for cash or food rations, directly creates assets for communities. These assets generate returns not only for individual households, but also for communities as a whole with multidimensional complementarities, including stimulating demand, connecting local communities to a larger labour market and preventing environmental degradation.[60]

63. Furthermore, labour market programmes also generate positive externalities at the macro-level. Income and assets generated from such programmes stimulate the economy through further consumption, taxation and investments. Concurrently, an increase of labour force participation and labour productivity among currently underrepresented groups improves overall resource allocation and is a strong driving force behind economic growth.[61]

C. Strengthen redistributive policies

64. While cash transfers contribute to reducing inequality, the key is the financing side of these transfers. A progressive tax system with clear redistributive aims is an important tool to reduce income inequalities, including inequalities between men and women. This implies a shift from taxing consumption, which is typically easier to capture, to taxing personal income and capital gains. Taxing consumption is usually regressive and anti-poor, as often flat rates or only a small number of different rates are applied, and the consumption share of low-income groups is typically higher than that of higher income groups. As women are more likely to be found in lower income groups, taxing consumption and applying flat rates is also more likely to perpetuate gender income inequalities.[62] Moreover, the tax system should

[59] Asian Development Bank, *The Social Protection Index: Assessing Results for Asia and the Pacific* (Manila, ADB, 2013), p. 61.

[60] Harold Alderman and Ruslan Yemtsov, "Productive role of safety nets", Discussion Paper No. 1203 (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2012).

[61] Andrea Bassanini and Danielle Venn, "The impact of labour market policies on productivity in OECD countries", *International Productivity Monitor*, vol. 17 (2008), pp. 3-15.

[62] Irene van Staveren, "Gender biases in finance", *Gender & Development*, vol. 9, No. 1 (2010), pp. 9-17.

be based on individual income, not combined household income, as the latter often discourages women from participating in the labour force.

65. Tax reforms also require the creation of a compliance framework, which would include more rigorous law enforcement and public awareness initiatives. Studies have shown that progressive tax systems significantly contribute to reducing inequality.[63] However, the inequality-reducing effect is reduced in environments of high tax evasion, while the inequality-reducing effect is stronger in countries with robust law enforcement mechanisms.[64] The reason behind this is that tax evasion by higher income groups has a stronger effect on foregone income to the State (and consequently on the potential for income distribution) than forgone tax from the informal sector. Thus, there is a need to strengthen revenue collection and tax enforcement by strengthening the rule of law and increasing awareness that tax evasion constitutes, not only a crime, but also a breach of the social contract. It is also incumbent upon government to demonstrate transparency and accountability in the utilization of tax revenues in order to ensure public support for progressive taxation.

66. Several countries in the Asia-Pacific region have already taken measures to address tax evasion. For example, the Philippines has started a campaign to increase transparency on tax payments and to encourage people to be conscientious about paying the right taxes.[65] The campaign particularly targets upper income groups. In a recent initiative, 47 countries world wide, among them 9 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, signed an agreement to share bank data to fight tax evasion.

D. Support evidence-based policymaking

67. Effective policymaking must be evidence-based. Towards this end, there is a need to strengthen research on inequality. Specifically, there is a need to conduct studies that go beyond disparities in income and are aimed at conceptualizing the pathways and intersection of multiple forms of inequality. Furthermore, more detailed analysis is required on the drivers of inequality as well as on the effectiveness of certain policies in reducing inequality. A regional platform such as ESCAP could be instrumental in supporting countries to pursue this agenda.

68. To support evidence-based research on inequality, more and better data are required. These steps should comprise the collection of more detailed and sex-disaggregated data on incomes and wages, as well as on access to health-care services and other social services, such as good-quality education, disaggregated by sex, income and area of residence. More detailed data are also needed on vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities, older persons, youth and migrants and their access to social services and political participation.

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[63] Isabelle Joumard and others, "Tackling income inequality", Discussion Paper Series, Forschungsinstitut zur Zukunft der Arbeit, No. 6910 (2012).

[64] Denvil Duncan and Klara Sabirianova Peter, "Unequal inequalities: do progressive taxes reduce income inequality?", Discussion Paper No. 6910, October (Bonn, Germany, IZA, 2012).

[65] Philippines, "Tax watch: a campaign for transparency and conscientiousness". Available from www.gov.ph/2013/07/31/tax-watch-a-campaign-for-transparency-and-conscientiousness (accessed 26 May 2014).

VI. Conclusion

69. The persistence of inequality in the region suggests that market-led growth alone is not enough to achieve inclusive and sustainable development. This document has shown, moreover, that there are several layers of inequality that reinforce each other creating "an inequality trap" that disproportionately affects women and girls and vulnerable groups, including youth, older persons, migrants and persons with disabilities. While income inequality is an important cause of poor access to education and health, in other cases, the social marginalization of certain groups or geographic location ca lead to similar outcomes, which in turn drives income inequality.

70. Income inequality has increased in several countries in the region, largely driven by fast industrial growth. In most countries where income inequality increased, the highest income deciles benefitted more from economic growth than other income groups, whereas the income shares of the bottom deciles decreased. At the same time, the share of the middle classes remained relatively stable in most cases. Even in those countries where inequality has fallen in the last 10 years, it still remains at relatively high levels. The region's experience over past decades also shows that the combination of macroeconomic stabilization, social protection and redistributive policies is effective for reducing inequalities.

71. Despite improvements in health and education, there are still pockets of deprivation in access to social services in the region. In several countries, lower income groups have limited access to health-care services and education than higher income groups. There are also pronounced differences in access to health care and education between rural and urban areas and between boys and girls, particularly in secondary education. Owing to exclusion based on social ascription, certain population groups face particular difficulties in accessing basic social services. For example, migrant workers and older persons often face limited access to health-care services.

72. Inequalities jeopardize the social cohesion and stability of societies. The "inequality trap" risks exacerbating social exclusion and creating a "bottom billion" group that would be left behind as countries reap the benefits of global and regional integration. Vulnerable groups are even more at risk of becoming part of this "bottom billion". Leaving individuals and groups behind could have a negative impact on the long-term development of Asia and the Pacific, for it implies that countries are not fully capitalizing on their economic and social potentials.

73. Given the issues that have been raised in this document, the Committee may wish to deliberate on the following four questions:

(a) How could social protection be enhanced to support the most vulnerable in the face of persistent inequalities?

(b) What policy measures are needed to generate job-rich growth under the decent work agenda?

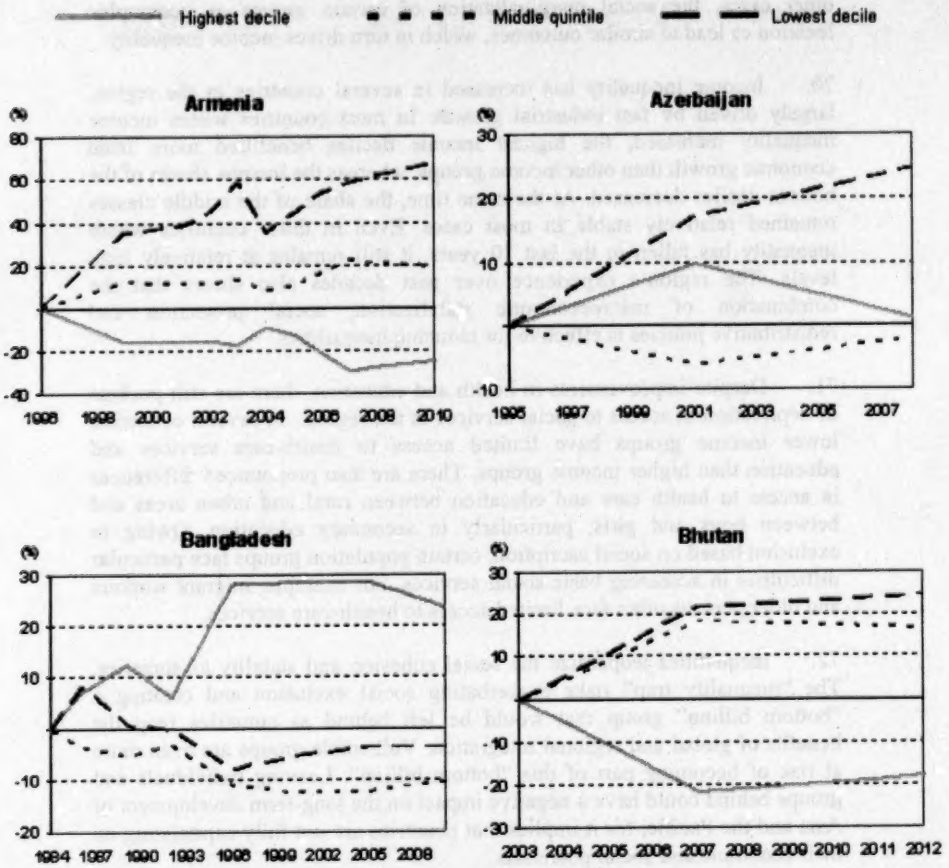
(c) What would be the most appropriate tax policies to both redistribute income and finance basic social services?

(d) What are the key research and data gaps in the area of inequality, and how could they be narrowed?

Annex

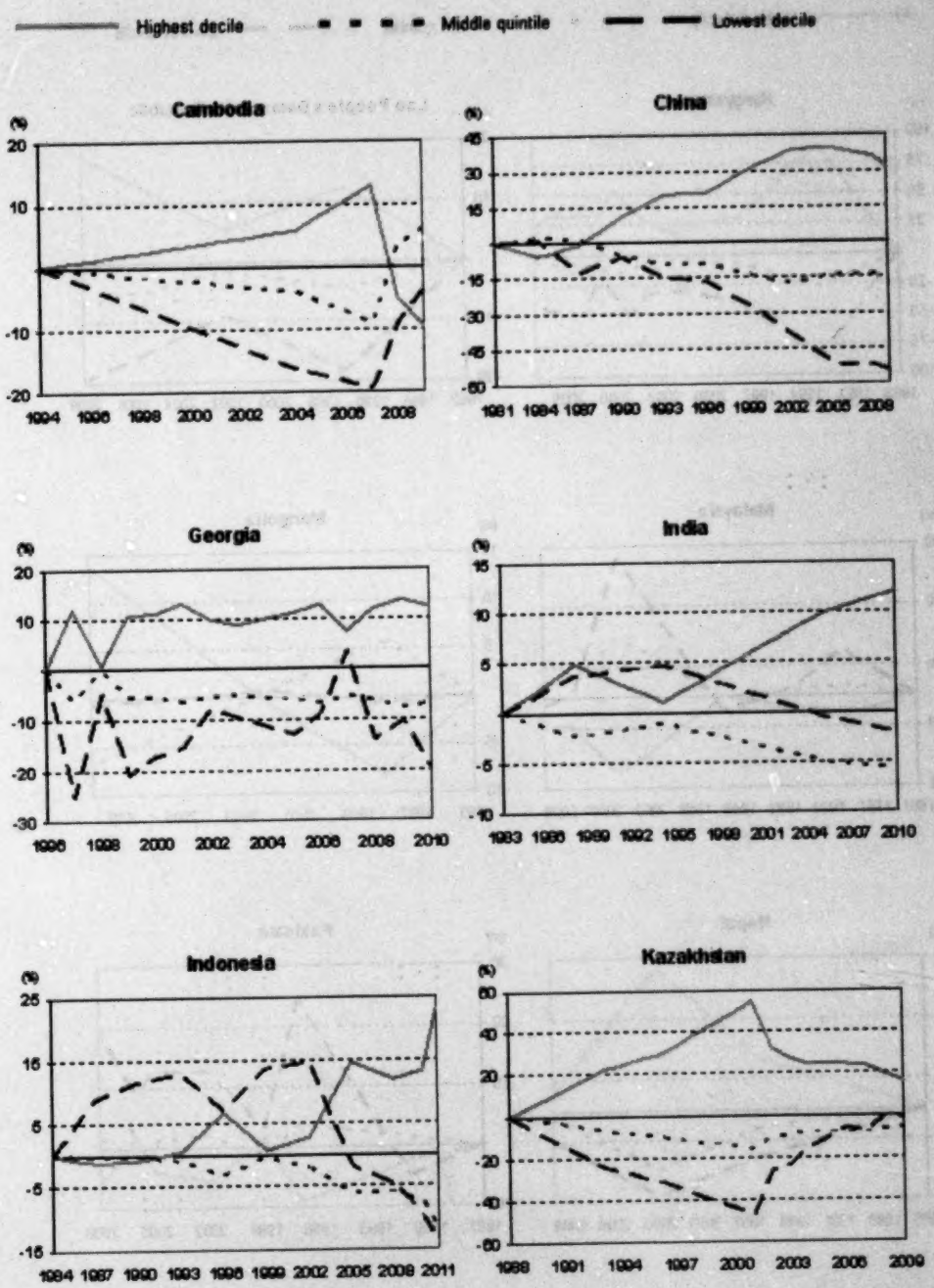
Figures*

In most countries the income of the rich is increasing at the cost of those at the bottom. The figures show change in income share (indexed to first available year), in selected countries.



* The 25 country graphs provided in this annex track the distribution of income between the rich (upper decile), the poor (lower decile), and the middle class (middle quintile) as it has changed in relation to the first available year. For example, in Bangladesh (above) the income share of the rich in 2009 had increased by nearly 25 per cent when compared with that of 1984. By contrast, the income share of the poor had decreased by about 5 per cent, while the income share of the middle class had decreased by 10 per cent.

Figures (cont'd)



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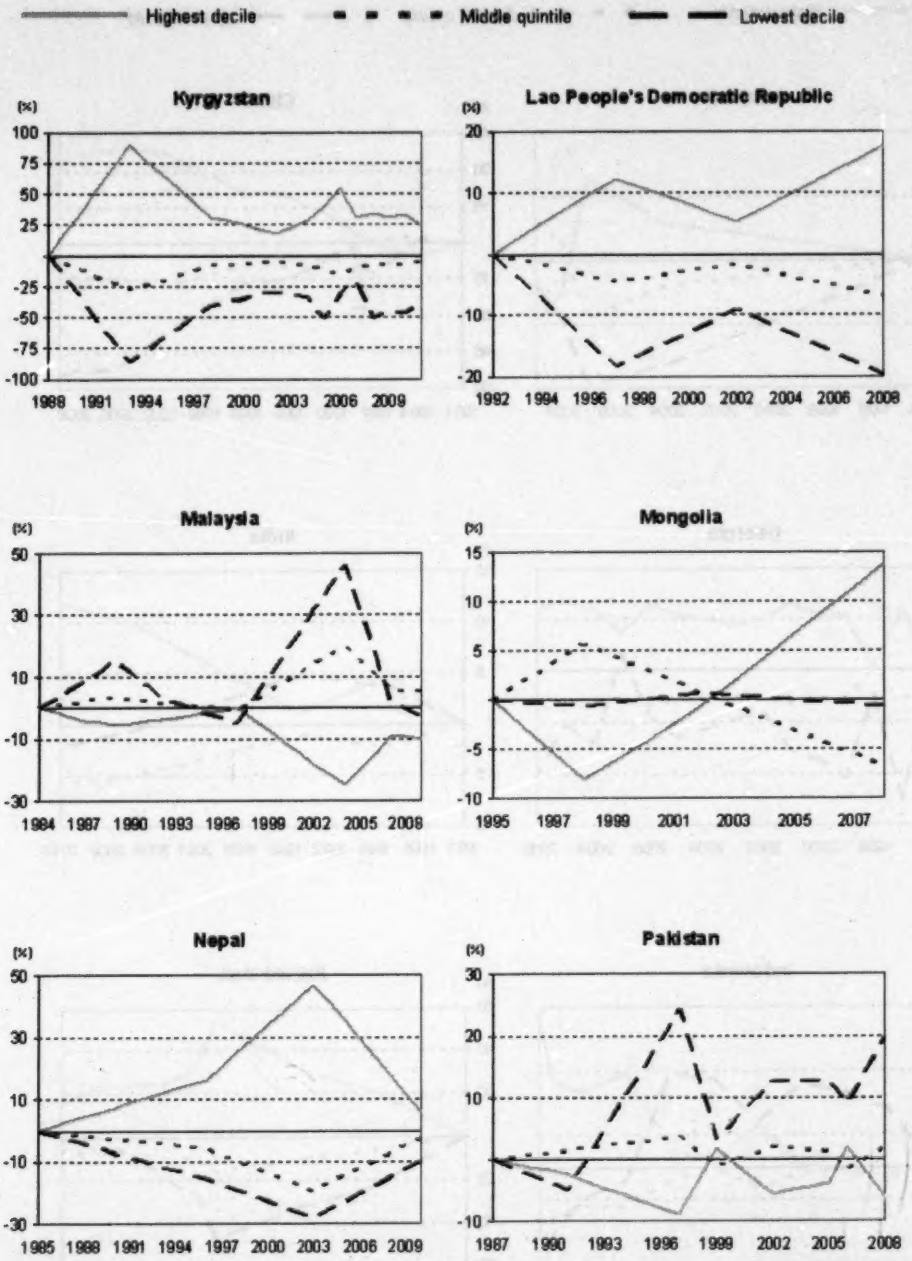

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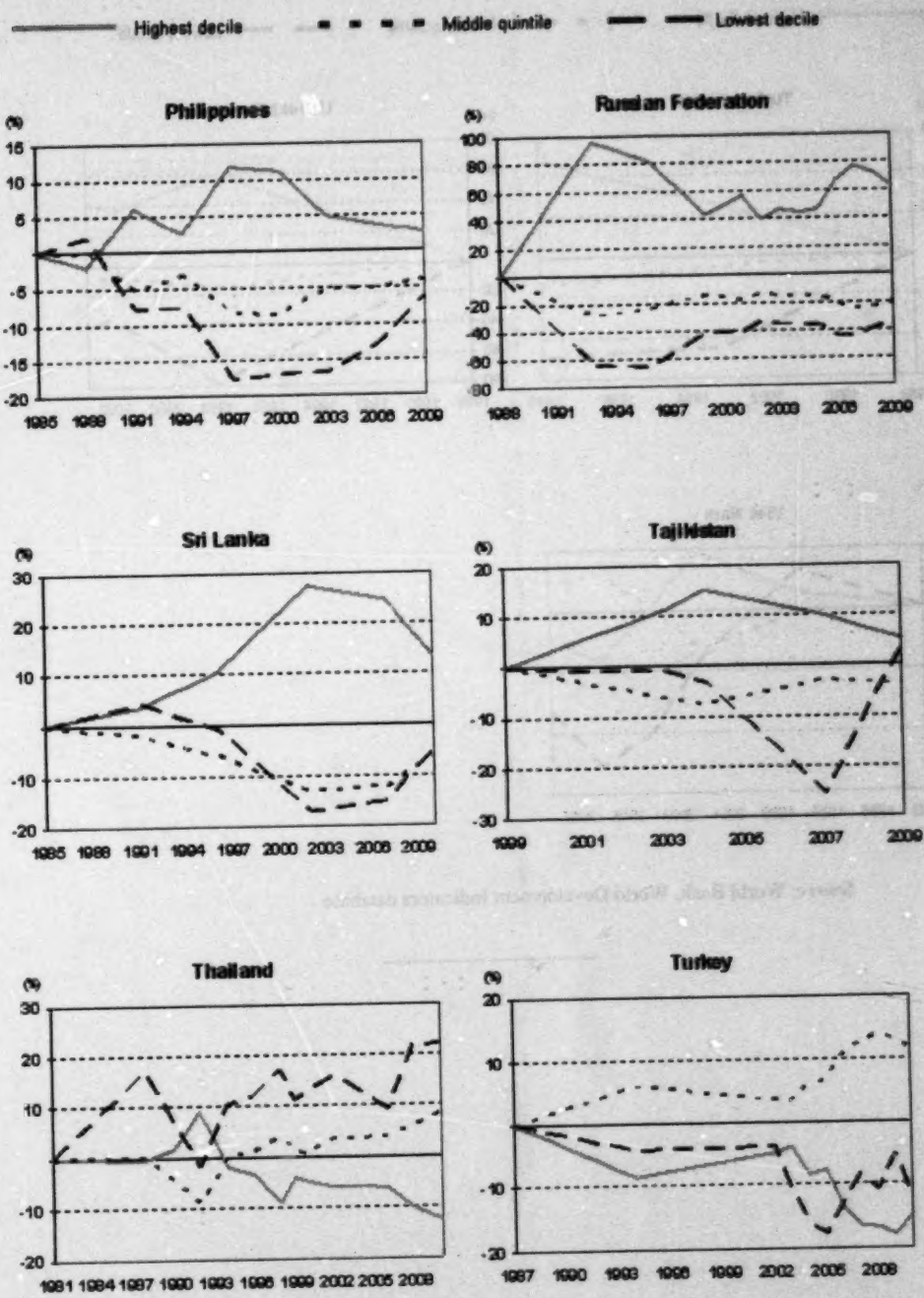

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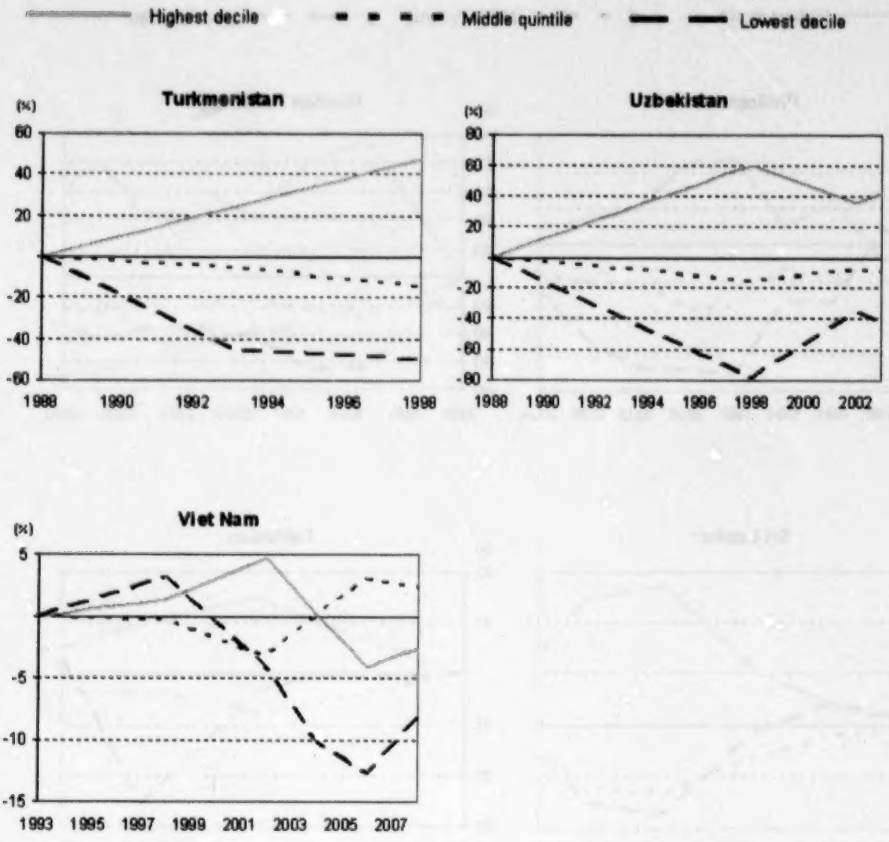
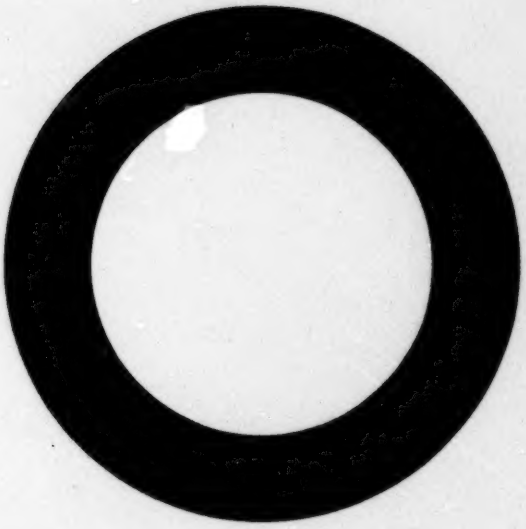


Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators database



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Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Committee on Social Development

Third session
Bangkok, 18-20 August 2014
Item 3(a) of the provisional agenda*
Consideration of a thematic focus on gender equality and women's empowerment in preparation for the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women: review of regional preparations for the Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+20 Review (Bangkok, 17-20 November 2014)

Asia-Pacific road map for the 20-year review of progress in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The year 2015 will mark the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which were adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in September 1995 and subsequently endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly. As mandated in United Nations Economic and Social Council resolution 2013/18 of 24 July 2013, the Commission on the Status of Women will undertake a review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at its fifty-ninth session in 2015. In support of the 2015 global review, and through the same resolution, the Economic and Social Council encouraged regional commissions to undertake regional reviews so that the outcomes of intergovernmental processes at the regional level could be fed into the 2015 review, and called upon all States to undertake comprehensive national-level reviews of the progress made and challenges encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, which was held in June 2000.

In anticipation of the global review and resulting outcome, ESCAP, in accordance with its programme of work for the biennium 2014-2015 and in cooperation with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, will lead the regional review of progress in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in Asia and the Pacific. The regional review process will provide a critical opportunity for delineating achievements and challenges in implementation of the Platform for Action in the last 20 years, as well as for identifying regional priorities and strategies for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in Asia and the Pacific, particularly in the context of the formulation of the development framework beyond 2015.

The Committee is invited to consider the proposed review process for the Asia-Pacific region and provide the secretariat with guidance in relation to the forthcoming Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+20 Review.

* E/ESCAP/CSD(3)/L.1.

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I. Introduction

1. In 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women and subsequently endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly through resolution 50/42. The Beijing Platform for Action constitutes a global framework for realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

2. The Beijing Platform for Action calls upon Governments, the international community and civil society, including the private sector, to empower women and girls by taking action in 12 critical areas: poverty; education and training; health; violence; armed conflict; the economy; power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; human rights; the media; the environment; and the girl child.

3. Every five years, progress in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action is reviewed by the Commission on the Status of Women. There have been three reviews to date, in 2000, 2005 and 2010, with each review resulting in an outcome document that reinforces the global commitment to the empowerment of women and girls and outlines priority actions for the coming five years.

II. The Beijing+20 Review

4. In 2015, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women will review implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly; the title of that session is Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century.

5. In support of the 2015 global review, the United Nations Economic and Social Council, through resolution 2013/18, called upon all States to undertake comprehensive national-level reviews of the progress made and challenges encountered in implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. The resolution also encouraged the regional commissions to undertake regional reviews so that the outcomes of intergovernmental processes at the regional level could be fed into the 2015 review.

6. Furthermore, resolution 2013/18 strongly encouraged Governments to continue to support the role and contribution of civil society, in particular that of non-governmental organizations and women's organizations, in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the

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outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. In this regard, it called upon Governments to collaborate with relevant stakeholders at all levels in preparation for the 2015 review so as to benefit from their experience and expertise.

7. For Asia and the Pacific, the regional review will primarily involve:

(a) Conducting in the first half of 2014 a regional intergovernmental survey for the purpose of obtaining national perspectives for the preparation of a regional report on progress in implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Asia and the Pacific, and background documentation for the Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+20 Review;

(b) Holding in Bangkok from 18 to 20 August 2014 the third session of the Committee on Social Development, a legislative subsidiary body of ESCAP, as a preparatory meeting for the Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+20 Review;

(c) Organizing civil society regional consultations on the Beijing+20 regional review;

(d) Convening in Bangkok from 17 to 20 November 2014 the Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+20 Review, through which it is anticipated that ESCAP member Governments would adopt a regional input into the global review process.

8. In Asia and the Pacific, it is intended that the 20-year review of progress in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action would be a participatory process involving all member States, and supported by the ESCAP secretariat in cooperation with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). In fostering inclusiveness, it is intended that the Beijing+20 regional review process for Asia and the Pacific also would engage civil society and other key stakeholders.

III. Analytical review

9. The engagement of member States in documenting progress in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action is critical in determining regional priorities and the Asia-Pacific input into the global Beijing+20 review process. In the Asia-Pacific region, documentation of progress in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action will occur primarily through responses to the aforementioned regional intergovernmental survey.

10. The regional intergovernmental survey distributed to Asia-Pacific member States specifically was focused on the 12 critical areas of concern contained in the Beijing Platform for Action. The regional survey provided an opportunity for ESCAP member States to reflect upon the measures that had been undertaken, recognizing achievements and noting where further work was required in the effort to realize gender equality and women's empowerment.

11. Responses to the Asia-Pacific regional survey will be supplemented by information furnished in national reviews on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The *Guidance note for the preparation of national reviews* was prepared by UN-Women and the regional commissions in order to facilitate the conduct of comprehensive national reviews on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action; it was issued to Member States by the Secretary-General in September 2013.

12. In addition to serving as an input into the review of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in Asia and the Pacific, the national reviews will also be used in the preparation of the documentation to be submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-ninth session.

13. The *Guidance note* also contains questions on four substantive sections: overview analysis of achievements and challenges since 1995; progress in the implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action since 2009; data and statistics; and emerging priorities. Member States were requested to submit their national review reports by 1 May 2014.

14. The secretariat is compiling and analysing the data from both the completed regional surveys and national review reports as submitted by ESCAP member States. The data and analysis will constitute the substantive content of a publication on progress in realizing gender equality and women's empowerment in Asia and the Pacific, as well as serve as background for the deliberations of, and provide the basis for the first draft of the outcome document for, the Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+20 Review.

IV. Building intergovernmental consensus

15. The third session of the ESCAP Committee on Social Development will be convened in Bangkok from 18 to 20 August 2014 in cooperation with UN-Women; it will serve as a preparatory meeting for the Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+20 Review.

16. The Committee on Social Development is invited to review the Beijing+20 regional review process and provide guidance and inputs on key issues to be included in the agenda of the aforementioned Asian and Pacific Conference. The Committee may also wish to consider the elements of a draft outcome document for the Asian and Pacific Conference, which was developed on the basis of responses from member States to the Asia and Pacific regional intergovernmental survey on the 12 critical areas of concern contained in the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as evidence drawn from national reviews and other recent studies.

17. The Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+20 Review will bring together ministers and senior officials from Asian and Pacific countries, including representatives of national women's machineries and key line ministries, as well as civil society representatives in observer capacity. It is anticipated that the regional report of progress in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action will inform the deliberations of the Conference and its consideration of the outcome document.

18. The Conference will be divided into a senior officials segment and a ministerial segment. In the senior officials segment there will be discussions on the findings of the regional review of progress and the remaining challenges in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in Asia and the Pacific; the senior officials will also work towards agreement on a draft outcome document of the Conference. In the ministerial segment, policy statements will be made by member States prior to possible adoption of such an outcome document. Various side events are also expected to be held during the Conference on issues related to the 12 critical areas of concern contained in the Beijing Platform for Action.

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V. Stakeholder engagement

19. In order to promote a diversity of voices, broad engagement and ownership of outcomes, the Asia-Pacific regional review of progress in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action will involve the participation of civil society representatives.

20. Civil society, including non-governmental organizations and academic institutions, will contribute to the regional review through various means. In February 2014, a consultation was held in cooperation with UN-Women involving civil society organizations from across Asia and the Pacific. The representatives of the participating civil society organizations reviewed achievements, remaining obstacles and future actions for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in the region. They also discussed possible means of engagement in the review of progress in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action at the national, subregional and regional levels.

21. It is expected that a civil society forum will be held in the week prior to the Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+20 Review. This forum will provide a platform for civil society organizations from the region to arrive at a consensus in relation to the draft outcome document and the messages that will be conveyed to member States during the Conference.

VI. Expected outcomes

22. In addition to the value that derives from dialogue between Governments in Asia and the Pacific, it is anticipated that the regional review of progress in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action would culminate in an outcome document, prospectively in the form of a ministerial declaration.

23. The outcome document would be informed by the national review reports and regional survey findings on analysing achievements, challenges and current priorities in relation to gender equality and women's empowerment. Through the outcome document, member States would have the opportunity to: (a) reconfirm commitment to concerted action on the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action; (b) identify priority issues for attention; and (c) specify measures to accelerate implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the era beyond 2015, with particular consideration being given to strengthening institutions, increasing financing, enhancing accountability, forging stronger partnerships and strengthening regional cooperation.

24. The aforementioned outcome document of the Asian and Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+20 Review would be considered by the Commission at its seventy-first session in May 2015.

25. Furthermore, both the regional report and the Conference outcome document would serve as inputs to the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2015. In addition to guiding countries in Asia and the Pacific, the Conference outcome document would potentially be useful in contributing to the formulation of the global agenda for realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women for the coming 10 years.

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Committee on Social Development

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Item 4 of the provisional agenda*
Consideration of the programmatic focus and planned outputs in the field of social development for the biennium 2016-2017

Programmatic focus and planned outputs in the field of social development for the biennium 2016-2017

Note by the secretariat

Summary

This document contains the proposed areas of focus for the formulation of the programme of work for the biennium 2016-2017 in the field of social development, which is under subprogramme 6 of programme 16 on economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific. The proposed areas are within the framework of the strategy of the subprogramme for the biennium 2016-2017, which was presented to the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission on 23 January 2014 and endorsed by the Commission at its seventieth session on 23 May 2014.

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I. Substantive priorities

1. To support Asia-Pacific member States in responding to emerging trends in social development, including the challenges of rising inequalities, the substantive priorities in the field of social development for the biennium 2016 to 2017 are proposed to be:

(a) Responding to the challenges of population dynamics;

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(b) Promoting equal rights and access to opportunities for women and socially vulnerable groups;

(c) Strengthening social protection and decent work for all.

2. The above-mentioned priorities are in alignment with the strategic framework for subprogramme 6 of programme 16 on economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific that was presented to the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission (ACPR) on 23 January 2014 and endorsed by the Commission on 23 May 2014, as reproduced in the annex to the present document for the convenient reference of the Committee.

3. These substantive priorities will be addressed by building a strong foundation through research and analysis which would contribute to a regional knowledge platform to strengthen the capacity of institutions in Asia and the Pacific. ESCAP would use its convening function in order to ensure that the outcomes of the secretariat's substantive analysis and research contribute also to the development of regional norms and standards to address social development challenges in the region.

II. Programme focus

4. In line with the above-mentioned substantive priorities and implementation modalities, it is proposed that the following programmatic areas be addressed for the biennium 2016-2017.

(a) Research and analysis

(i) Priority will be accorded to strengthening the evidence base on issues related to rising inequalities and social vulnerabilities in order to support member States in their efforts to strengthen the social pillar of sustainable development. Towards this end, the secretariat will conduct research and analysis and develop knowledge products, including a comprehensive database of population and socioeconomic indicators for the Asian and Pacific region. An enhanced version of the "Social Protection Toolbox", an e-knowledge platform to support member States in building more robust and comprehensive social protection systems, will be further refined for specific national settings;

(ii) Analytical publications will be produced to highlight critical social development issues in the region. These include the following:

a. "Realizing the Potential of Youth", by focusing on the linkages between the dynamics of youth exclusion and sustainable development in the region;

b. The economic implications of population ageing in Asia and the Pacific and harnessing the "second demographic dividend", by examining current and projected impacts of population ageing on the labour market and identifying policies to harness the second demographic dividend;

c. "Women's Transformative Leadership in Asia and the Pacific", by exploring the nature and role of women's transformative leadership and its contribution to the achievement of gender equality and inclusive and sustainable development;

d. "Making Room for All: Improving Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific", by examining, among other things, the cost of exclusion of persons with disabilities;

(iii) Policy and working papers will be developed on key social development issues having impacts on inequality and vulnerability in the region, including social protection measures to reduce inequality and vulnerabilities, as well as income support schemes, including pensions for older persons; and gender equality, economic empowerment and leadership of women; in addition to technical materials on youth, ageing, international migration and HIV. Further, surveys and innovative research projects will be conducted to ensure the necessary evidence base for policymaking;

(iv) The periodical *Asia-Pacific Population Journal* will continue to be published to promote research on population and development issues and provide an evidence base for population policy formulation in the region. *Disability at a Glance*, a recurrent publication which provides a regional overview of disability policies and practices as well as country data and information, will also be produced to support the implementation of the *Incheon Strategy to "Make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific.*

(b) Intergovernmental convening and norm setting

Efforts will be focused on promoting a stronger Asia-Pacific voice to build intergovernmental consensus to accelerate further action to implement internationally and regionally agreed commitments. Through the grounding of its intergovernmental work in evidence-based research and analysis and the findings derived from capacity-development programmes, the secretariat will try to strengthen regionally agreed norms and standards to promote inclusive and sustainable development. The major intergovernmental reviews to take place during the biennium 2016-2017 include the following:

(i) *Midterm review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities*: The outcome is expected to identify progress made and remaining gaps in responding to the commitments set out in the *Incheon Strategy to "Make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific*;

(ii) *The Asian and Pacific Intergovernmental Conference on Strengthening Youth Participation and Inclusive Policies*: The outcome is expected to be the adoption of a consensus document to identify regional priorities and actions to respond to the needs of youth and enhance their involvement in policymaking;

(iii) *The Third Regional Review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in Asia and the Pacific*: In the Review, it is expected that the progress made and challenges faced in the implementation the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in the region will be assessed. The outcome is expected to serve as the regional input into the global review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, and provide a regional framework of actions and strategies to prepare for rapidly ageing societies in the Asian and Pacific region.

(c) Technical cooperation

The secretariat will implement a series of technical cooperation projects to respond to regional needs that lend themselves to regional cooperation. The implementation modalities will be focused on building the capacity of institutions to enhance policy formulation and implementation, knowledge sharing, training and exchange of good practices. The outcomes of the projects will be used to inform the analytical and intergovernmental work of the secretariat.

(i) The capacity of member States to identify and respond to key population trends and dynamics affecting the region will be strengthened, including through implementation of technical cooperation activities to increase knowledge concerning the economic contribution of migrants in countries of origin and destination, protection of the rights of migrants and improvement of statistics on international migration. Technical cooperation activities will also be implemented to strengthen the capacity of national institutions to promote and protect the rights of older persons. Moreover, the capacity of member States to implement responsive youth policies and increase the participation of youth in inclusive and sustainable development will be enhanced;

(ii) The capacity of member States to broaden social protection coverage over the life course will be strengthened, including for older persons and persons living with and affected by HIV;

(iii) Capacity will be enhanced to accelerate implementation of international commitments to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, and promote the economic empowerment and leadership of women in Asia and the Pacific.

(d) Coordination with other United Nations entities to obtain synergies and complementarities to deliver as One UN:

In its capacity as Chair of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM), the secretariat will continue to promote coherence and synergy in the efforts of the United Nations system in the area of social development. The secretariat will co-chair and contribute to the RCM thematic working groups on international migration including human trafficking; and gender equality and empowerment of women; as well as to the RCM-United Nations Development Group Thematic Working Group on Youth. The secretariat will continue to engage with the entities concerned in joint planning processes and joint implementation of activities, where appropriate, to strengthen the impact of United Nations work in the social sector in Asia and the Pacific.

Throughout its programmatic focus, special efforts will be made by the secretariat to advance gender equality and women's empowerment and address the differentiated impact of social development trends and policies on men and women.

Annex

The strategic framework 2016-2017, as endorsed by the Commission at its seventieth session, 23 May 2014[a]

Subprogramme 6
Social development

Objective of the Organization: To strengthen regional cooperation in building a socially inclusive society that protects, empowers and ensures equality for all social groups in Asia and the Pacific

Expected accomplishments of the secretariat	Indicators of achievement
(a) Enhanced knowledge, capacity and regional cooperation to address population and development trends, including their gender dimensions, in Asia and the Pacific	(a) (i) Percentage of respondents indicating that their knowledge has been enhanced through the analytical products of ESCAP on population and development trends and policies, including their gender dimensions (ii) Percentage of participants indicating that their knowledge and skills have been enhanced through ESCAP meetings and workshops on population ageing, migration and development, youth development and other population-related issues, including their gender dimensions (iii) Number of initiatives taken by member States, based on regional frameworks, to promote population and development policies and programmes, including their gender dimensions
(b) Enhanced knowledge, capacity and regional cooperation to strengthen social protection systems, including the health and gender dimensions, in Asia and the Pacific	(b) (i) Percentage of respondents indicating that their knowledge has been enhanced through the analytical products of ESCAP on social protection policies and good practices, including the health and gender dimensions (ii) Percentage of participants indicating that their knowledge and skills have been enhanced through ESCAP meetings and workshops on social protection systems and HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services, including their gender dimensions (iii) Number of initiatives by member States and stakeholders, based on regional frameworks, to strengthen social protection systems, including access to health care, and their gender dimensions

[a] The strategic framework for programme 16 on economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific was endorsed by the Commission at its seventieth session as noted in Commission decision 70/3.

(c) Enhanced knowledge, capacity and regional cooperation to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Asia and the Pacific	(c) (i) Percentage of respondents indicating that their knowledge has been enhanced through the analytical products of ESCAP on gender equality and women's empowerment policies and programmes (ii) Percentage of participants indicating that their knowledge and skills have been enhanced through ESCAP meetings and workshops on gender equality and women's empowerment (iii) Number of initiatives taken by member States, based on regional frameworks, to promote gender equality and women's empowerment
(d) Enhanced knowledge, capacity and regional cooperation to promote the rights of persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific	(d) (i) Percentage of respondents indicating that their knowledge has been enhanced through the analytical products of ESCAP on disability-related policies and programmes (ii) Percentage of participants indicating that their knowledge and skills have been enhanced through ESCAP meetings and workshops on disability-inclusive development and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (iii) Number of initiatives by member States and stakeholders to promote the regional implementation of the Incheon Strategy to Make the Right Real for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, including goal 6: "Ensure gender equality and women's empowerment"

Strategy

16.35 The substantive responsibility for the subprogramme is vested in the Social Development Division. The strategic direction of the subprogramme is derived mainly from the commitments agreed upon through relevant United Nations intergovernmental processes, including: (a) the World Summit for Social Development; (b) the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development; (c) the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; (d) the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; (e) the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; (f) the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; (g) the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002; (h) the World Programme of Action on Youth; (i) the United Nations Millennium Declaration (see General Assembly resolution 55/2) and the commitments adopted by the General Assembly in the outcome document, "Keeping the promise: united to achieve the Millennium Development Goals" (resolution 65/1); and (j) the Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: Intensifying our Efforts to Eliminate HIV and AIDS (General Assembly resolution 65/277, annex); it will also be guided by the post-2015 development agenda (as and when approved by the General

Assembly). Regional mandates that guide the subprogramme include the Incheon Strategy, the Bangkok Statement on the Asia-Pacific Review of the Implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, the Bangkok Declaration on Beijing+15, the outcome document of the Asia-Pacific High-level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Assessment of Progress against Commitments in the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS and the Millennium Development Goals and the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development of the Sixth Asian and Pacific Population Conference, which was adopted by a vote.

16.36 The subprogramme will aim to promote change at the policy and institutional levels. The main target group of the subprogramme will be government officials and institutions, particularly those involved in the formulation, implementation and management of social development policies and programmes. The strategy will focus on the conduct of applied research, analysis and the dissemination of knowledge products on social policy options, strategies and programmes as a basis for evidence-based decision-making by Governments. Good practices on social protection systems, including those that are gender-responsive and address the needs of vulnerable groups in society, will be analysed and documented for the purpose of adaptation and wider replication in the region. The Commission's convening role, particularly with regard to promoting regional cooperation and consensus building on accelerating the implementation of international commitments on population and development, gender equality and social integration of vulnerable groups, will be emphasized. Technical assistance to developing countries, including those in special situations, will be intensified to build national capacity, including through sharing of policy options, good experiences and good practices in the context of the transfer of knowledge and skills on a range of social development issues and through South-South cooperation. The subprogramme will adopt a multipronged strategy that incorporates cross-cutting issues, including gender responsiveness and a rights-based approach, into policies and programmes. Partnerships will be further strengthened with a range of stakeholders, including civil society organizations and research institutes. The subprogramme will coordinate closely with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and other international organizations to achieve synergy and maximize impact in the region.

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Other matters

Dates for the fourth session of the Committee on Social Development

Note by the secretariat

1. ESCAP resolution 69/1 mandates the convening of the Committee on Social Development, as a subsidiary body of the Commission, on a biennial basis during even years.

2. The secretariat therefore proposes for endorsement that the fourth session of the Committee on Social Development be held in the fourth quarter of 2016.

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